ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of October 28, 2013
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present: Boutin, Clark, Chakraborty, Chandler, Dawson, Douglass, Falkoff, Goldenberg, Gordon, House, Li, Molnar, Shortridge

Guests: Rowene Linden, Assistant to the Chair, Department of Accountancy; Rebecca Shortridge, Assistant Chair, Department of Accountancy; Beth Towell, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, College of Business; and Jim Young, Chair, Department of Accountancy

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Falkoff who is chairing the meeting on behalf of Interim Executive Vice President and Provost Freeman.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of October 14, 2013, and the motion passed unanimously.

Young thanked Linden and Shortridge for their efforts in putting this report together. He also thanked the provost’s staff and the subcommittee for their efforts in reviewing the report and helping the department build better programs.

In the interest of time we will focus less on the strengths, but they are listed in the subcommittee report. We will focus mainly on questions we wanted to address; not every question in the report will be discussed today.

There are many strengths noted in the departmental context section. The facilities are enviable assets for the department. The department manages a robust internship program. The faculty is young and accomplished, and the accounting programs have been ranked in the top 25 best programs.

One discussion point is that the internship program seems crucial to graduation and employment, but only half of the applicants secure internships, and only one-quarter of the students participate in them. Is there anything the department can do to increase placements? The internships are a wonderful path to employment. Are these numbers based on upper-level students? Only seniors or master’s students participate in internships; juniors are not allowed to participate unless they create their own internship. This would mean that about 200 students are eligible to participate, not 400 students. We would love to have 100 percent participation. The highest we have been is around 70 percent participation. Recently, this has been driven by the economy. The CPA firms rely on providing services, so when services go down, these firms hire less interns. The economy seems to be improving.

The department has 24 faculty members, and 7 are non-tenure track instructors. Is this an ideal ratio? Are you comfortable with this mix? There are 17 tenured or tenure-track faculty and 7 instructors, and the department does not want to see the ratio change much more. The full-time instructors maintain certification and have strong links to the profession.
There are no senior members of the graduate faculty. As of last week, there are now nine. The subcommittee raised this question, and we responded to the question. Five are full professors, and four are associate professors. Does the department now have a system in place for making sure people are at the highest level? There was never any indication that we should do this until we did the program review. What is the purpose of this? It gives flexibility, and it gives the university a little higher prestige. Many departments don’t have a process for this, but if you develop a process, it would be helpful. The department will be doing this going forward.

Minority representation on the faculty is 2 out of 24. The department has not recruited for almost six years now. It is a very competitive environment. The demand for Ph.D.s in accounting versus production is two to one, and it is three to one in certain areas. When you look at the minority population, the environment is even more competitive. The gender balance in the department is 50/50. We would love to have more minority faculty members.

Will the strong financial support from donors continue? It can’t trail off because we need this support. The donors have been very supportive in the last five years. We have seen donor support increase even in this economy. This will continue.

The strengths for the B.S. in Accountancy section of the review are the dynamic curriculum and the quality of the study body. The strong internship program leads directly to graduates' employment.

One discussion point is a question about writing skills. Students take English 103 and 104, but you have another writing course that they also take. Students in accountancy do not take an extra writing course, but writing skills are part of many courses that students take. The program is pleased with the writing skills the students have. Communication skills are important; there is room for improvement, and we are focused on this.

Employment numbers one year after graduation have declined over the past few years from 80 percent to 63 percent. You posit several factors for this including the economic slowdown. Is entry into graduate programs really a significant factor as well? Half of our undergraduates move into our graduate program. The requirements to sit for the CPA include a 150 hours course work requirement. Some of these graduates get great jobs. The economy has had an impact especially on the public accounting firms, and this has been a problem.

There has been a significant decline in enrollment since 2008 (from 937 students to 742 students), while other schools’ enrollments have increased or stayed steady. Can you give us a sense of what is going on? The enrollment in the college is down, and so is the overall university enrollment. The program focuses on the upper-division junior and senior students to ensure we have 200 juniors retained each year, and we have been successful at this in the last couple of years. This is part of the reason why you won’t see a drop in degrees awarded. The program is seeing more transfers than we have had in the past, and we are visiting community colleges in the area. We host all community colleges accounting faculty on campus, which will be an important link going forward. We also send out a newsletter to community college faculty every semester. I believe these faculty members appreciate the information we send. We have had good reception at the community colleges.

Why has enrollment for women declined? Fewer females are moving into the accounting field. The decline in female enrollment mirrors the decline in female enrollment for the College of Business. Female enrollment is around 35 percent. We wonder whether the issue of violence on campus is an
issue that we need to confront. The college has been pro-active on this by reaching out to female alumnus. We are concerned about this, and we are trying to focus on how to make this better. Some of the female majors feel overwhelmed by some of the male students. A couple of the females that I know plan all their classes together. Maybe having a program for females in accountancy would be good.

In the program areas needing improvement section you say you are concerned about the application of technology throughout the curriculum and about providing global experiences for students, but those issues were not addressed in the report. Do students have access to Excel. Yes, most students bring laptops to class. You can be anywhere and use the software. Our students need to have a global mindset, and employers say our students have to be ready for a global economy. We need to make sure our students have a global experience. The global mindset needs to be incorporated into the curriculum by adding non-business or business classes that increase students’ views of the world. Students need to be exposed to different ways to think globally. I would love to talk to your class about study abroad in Thailand in the summer. The topic of the study abroad is Thailand’s political relations between dominate and minority populations for everyday living. In another two years Thailand will become a free flow community. You can build a global mindset; we need to think about how to do this. The college is thinking about this as part of the Passport Program. The master’s program has 10 percent international students in it. Employers are resistant to sponsor international students. This costs money. The concern is can we place these students after they graduate. Employers have to be willing to help the person get permanent residency by paying the fees. The smaller firms say they can’t incur these costs because the students may go back to their home countries and get jobs. What is happening is as the middle-class community grows in China this will change, so we will have a better opportunity going forward. Most of our students in the past wanted to stay in the U.S.

One of the discussion points for the M.A.S. program is enrollment. Enrollment has decreased significantly since 2008. How did you go from 163 students to 129 students, while programs at other universities have seen enrollment increases. Program costs were increased and so were the admissions standards. The GMAT quantitative requirement has gone up. Some of this was planned. The program was underpriced in the market. Our program costs $21,500; DePaul’s program costs $41,000; University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign’s program costs $34,000; and University of Illinois, Chicago program costs $29,000. We are a value leader. The increase in costs would reduce enrollment. Approximately 95 percent of our students have some financial support. Scholarship support at the graduate level has increased over the last five years, and we do have graduate assistantships. Have you tried to crunch the numbers on whether the decrease in female students has had an impact. Females account for 44 percent of the students enrolled in this program, which is better than the undergraduate program. The decline in enrollment has been less than the decline in the college enrollment. In terms of the performance metrics, has there been any change in the number of degrees awarded. I haven’t noticed any decline, but I don’t have these statistics.

Another discussion point is the decline in the number of internships, which you have already addressed. The paid internships for graduate students are more competitive. For the firms it is better to identify a talented senior instead of a graduate student. Students are more likely to have more employment opportunities after they secure an internship. The placement rate is 90 percent. Some master’s students have jobs in other fields. Some seniors get job offers and defer the offers for a year to get the master’s. Do you keep track of this? This would be a useful benchmark indicator. We do ask, but we don’t keep track of this. We could.
What happened to the employer feedback in 2012? The feedback on interns is lower in almost all categories compared with previous years. The employers are not as enthusiastic about providing feedback. At the undergraduate level this has improved. At the graduate level we may need to use medians instead of means because of the decline in internship opportunities. Another issue is our students have internships at large accounting firms, and they are much more unwilling to provide feedback.

For the M.S. in Taxation program we have the same question regarding the enrollment drop. This is an evening part-time program offered at Hoffman Estates. More than 90 percent of the students in this program are employed full-time. We know by talking to people who work at accounting firms and our students that there has been a decline in support for employees who want to complete master’s degrees. The downturn in the economy is the primary reason for the decrease in enrollments. You would like the enrollment to be higher? Yes, we would. There is a program fee attached to this program, and we are thinking about different ways to increase enrollment in this program. We are thinking about having the taxation faculty go out and talk to some of the smaller firms in the region. The Big 8 firms are focused on doing their own educational training. We have talked to representatives from accounting firms about continuing education and the program during lunch meetings. There is a requirement of 40 hours of continuing education. We would like to market the program more actively. We are also interested in doing an online program to serve the Chicago market. We have contacts from firms in Illinois, but they can’t send their employees to Chicago. We could partner online exclusively or partner with a firm. NIU faculty would deliver five core courses. It would be the firm’s program, not ours. The online platform is key for that to happen. You start to think with this many faculty this is the right number of students. Online programs can get very large very quickly. We have not thought about what the ideal number of students would be. We could get back up to the level we were at five years ago. We have the capacity to increase 20 to 25 percent. Is there capacity within existing sections? Yes. Online programs would have a common shared infrastructure. This was in process. The new president would like to take a look at this before we move forward. We do have some of the things required to do this in-house, but we need more. The majority of firms do in-house programs. Can you partner with them to offer something? That would be fantastic, but the large firms have their own training facilities. You raise another great question, linkages with the Law School. Maybe there is an opportunity that exists here. We do have law school students in our program. The J.D./M.S.T. is a very potent degree combination. We met with the dean of the College of Law recently, and we will discuss this.

Another discussion item is benchmarking. The third benchmark is that all courses will be taught by academically or professionally qualified faculty. This is an accreditation issue. AACSB has three categories: academically qualified, professionally qualified, and other. The academically qualified individuals have a terminal degree, and the professionally qualified individuals don’t have terminal degrees but maintain licensure in the field and must demonstrate certain requirements. The other category is used when a person is not academically or professionally qualified. For the M.S.T. program we have to make sure that no one falls in the other category. Individuals that fall in the other category are faculty who didn’t meet the publishing requirement. These people teach, but they don’t teach in the taxation program. AACSB will be moving to four categories in the future. Thank you for highlighting the benchmarking information; we had a lack of understanding on this, and we will make some changes going forward. We were doing this looking back instead of looking forward.
You noted that more than 90 percent of the students in this program are full-time workers, so they would have some time constraints. Does it make sense to take this program to other locations? This would be difficult to do because of the AACSB standards across all programs and locations; there is a resource constraint. We asked if students in Naperville would travel to Hoffman Estates, and they said no. If we offer the program at Naperville, we would have an increase in enrollment, but we lack the resources to do this. What about video conferencing? Is that one location or two? It is another location, but you have a qualified professor teaching at both locations.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck